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ABSTRACT

Topics and issues which are central features of current secondary school economics curricula can be used to develop two aspects of students' thinking skills: (1) the development of problem-solving skills, and (2) the recognition of logical fallacies. The efficacy of economics instruction as a vehicle for developing student problem-solving skills arises because the subjects' major concern is that of analyzing how scarce resources are allocated between competing needs. The core concept of the subject is therefore that of choice, which parallels the central problem confronting all decision makers, namely the choice of competing alternatives to achieve a given purpose. The second area, the development of students' understanding of logical fallacies inherent in economic dilemmas, results when students' initial attempts at an explanation of the causes of inflation, unemployment, and underdevelopment are met with explanations about the limitations of reasoning by analogy and generalizations from small samples. Case studies and readings which can be used to stimulate questions about logical thinking and problem-solving skills are provided in appendices entitled "Even Rationing is Better Than Nothing," "Air Bags May be Motorists Best Bargain Ever," and "Price Controls on Food." A bibliography of over 20 related resources concludes the publication. (LH)

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Paper presented at the 'Conference on Thinking',
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Developing thinking skills within the context of the existing secondary school curriculum : the case of Economics.

Introduction:

In the published proceedings of the previous conference on thinking (Maxwell 1983) it was evident that whilst there was widespread agreement that pupils should be taught thinking skills there were diverse views on what constituted thinking and how it could most effectively be taught. With reference to the latter issue de Bono (1983) argued that a course in thinking should be divorced from any specific subject area and McPeck (1983) took the view that the development of thinking skills was, and should be, the concern of existing subject areas. It is the purpose of this paper to argue that the teaching of thinking skills can effectively become a central feature of the implemented school curriculum by developing and emphasizing this aspect of existing subject/ content areas. Whilst most existing subjects within the secondary school curriuclum would claim that they make a contribution to developing thinking skills it is argued that this purpose is often submerged under the concern for subject content. The extent to which the development of some thinking skills is already an implicit concern of existing subjects within the secondary school curriculum will be illustrated by reference to the case of Economics.

The remainder of the paper will be devoted to illustrating how topics and issues which are a central feature of current secondary school economics curricula can be used to develop two aspects of pupils' thinking skills: namely the recognition of the main logical fallacies and the development of pupils' problem solving skills.

From the above outline it is evident that I reject de Bonos' assertion that thinking skills should be taught without reference to existing subject/content areas. McPeck (1983) has comprehensively outlined the limitations of this viewpoint which I do not intend to rehearse in this paper. However McPeck's view that such skills are taught by existing school subjects is I believe at best optimistic. On this point I would accept de Bono's view that thinking skills are usually submerged under the concern for subject content.

A more pragmatic but nevertheless important reason for maintaining that existing subjects should serve as a vehicle for teaching thinking skills is dervied from what we know from educational research about the implementation of curriculum innovations. Cremin (1965) in his classic study of the history of the progressive education movement in the USA argued that it was primarily a history of ideas. The source of this history had come from the top of the educational hierarchy which resulted in an emphasis on intentions and not on classroom practices. If changes are to occur in the classroom which result in pupils developing thinking skills then we must be aware that there are a large number of logically desirable and internally consistent innovations which have merely contributed to the rhetoric of educational change. I would like to briefly identify some of the main findings of this research which have implications for how thinking skills could be successfully implemented within the school curriculum.

(1) Innovations which require users to change their behaviours are less likely to succeed than those which require structural or administrative changes. (Smith 1979, Goodlad and Klein 1970). Therefore changes in methods of teaching are more difficult to make successfully than changes in content.

Thus Orlosky and Smith (1972) comment:

'A change that requires teachers to abandon an existing practice and to displace it with a new practice risks defeat.'

(2) Users adapt innovations so that they can be incorporated in their existing approaches (Berman and McLaughlin 1976).

(3) Teachers act as rational decision makers who decide whether to attempt to implement an innovation with reference to an essentially pragmatic set of criteria. If an innovation is to be used by teachers then it must satisfy pragmatic criteria such as the following (i) is it instrumental in terms of classroom contingencies? (ii) is it congruent with prevailing conditions? (iii) what are the costs involved in using the innovation? (Doyle and Ponder, 1977, Hurst 1978.)

(4) Innovations which require both a large scale of change and a radical change of behaviour usually produce only a facade of change. (Smith and Keith 1971, Havelock and Huberman 1977.) This strategy of change is appropriately referred to as the 'alternative of grandeur' (Smith and Keith 1971).

These findings clearly point to the need for a gradualist strategy of innovation which emphasizes the proximate and underplays the remote. Due attention should therefore be given to the improvement of existing curricula quality despite the attraction of novelty. The problem is that existing curricula intentions are not adequately implemented. Further changes might exacerbate this problem by imposing additional demands on already hard pressed teachers. The proposition which is suggested is therefore that an attempt should be made to support the successful implementation of those aspects of existing curricula which are attempting

to develop pupils thinking skills. To ignore the reality of what goes on in schools and to focus solely on what ought to be is to pursue a strategy of curriculum development which contains the hall marks of failure.

Justifying the inclusion of Economics in the Secondary School Curriculum:

That there are already curricula and teachers who do explicitly attempt to develop pupils' thinking skills is illustrated by the case of Economics. Texts such as that of Fels and Buckles (1981) and Brue and Wentworth (1976) have stressed 'problem solving' as the major purpose for learning economics. This approach to economics education has become increasingly influential over the last decade and the most comprehensive current innovation in economics education (Hansen 1977) states that:

> 'We believe that emphasis must be given to preparing young people to grapple with both social and personal issues and questions. To do so, they must, in each case be familiar with the concepts and approach of Economics, and they must be able to apply them in a reasoned way so as to come to informed decisions on specific issues.'

This viewpoint on the purpose of economics education is competing with a number of alternate viewpoints which stress the importance of pupils' understanding; economic analysis, economic institutions and economics history. Whilst the problem solving apporach is now very influential at the level of curriculum intentions it has had less of an impact at the level of classroom practices (Morris 1984a).

When Economics educators have specified the benefits which the 'consumer' will obtain from his exposure to an introductory Economics course this has usually contained some reference to his acquiring the ability to reason, 'rationally', 'logically', 'clearly' or even 'economically'. Economic 'reasoning' is itself an application of logical reasoning. Accordingly, one is not trying to teach the pupils how to reason 'economically' but rather to get them to reason logically through

their exposition to the usage of logical reasoning for the analysis of 'Economic' problems.

The vast majority of school pupils do not pursue their study of Economics beyond their initial exposure to it in an Introductory course. Furthermore, the bulk of the content of an Economics course will be forgotten soon after the course and its examination have been completed. Accordingly course outlines which list an undifferentiated number of potential contributions of Economics to a pupil's cognitive development implicitly assume that the content studied will be both remembered and applied, or that the subject will be studied further at a later stage.

When these assumptions are inapplicable what enduring significance can be claimed for the study of Economics? The answer lies clearly in the methodology and whilst this is paid homage to in statements concerning curriculum intentions and the introductions to textbooks it often receives little explicit coverage in curriculum materials. Sections devoted to aspects of logical reasoning are sometimes implicitly included in those introductory sections of the syllabus and textbook, which are primarily concerned with the positive/normative distinction, the appropriate role of the economist and the nature of Economic models and theories. Topics which are central to the development of a reasoned approach such as the identification of the problem, the premises of different arguments, the implicit assumptions of a policy position and the fallacies to logical reasoning are rarely referred to after an initial genuflection at the beginning of a text.

The logic in this position assumes that because Economics is based on a logical framework, then pupils who study it will be exposed to its internal logic and will therefore learn how to reason logically. The result of allowing the 'logic' to remain implicit is that it can

contribute to a situation where the pupils are capable of reproducing Economic models and analysis -- without necessarily their understanding the logical framework inherent in that analysis. Equally they might learn to reason 'economically', without a realization that the logic they were utilizing is not confined to the analysis of Economic problems.

One of the less remarkable findings of educational research on learning achievement is that a pupil tends to learn more about those areas/skills which the teacher is specifically and explicitly attempting to teach the pupils. The implications of this have been recognized in Economics education with regard to the 'application' of economic analysis by pupils. Increasingly this objective has been accompanied by teachers actively attempting to ensure that pupils apply principles they have learnt through the use of case studies, data response material etc., for one cannot presume that a mere knowledge of Economic theory will necessarily result in the learner's ability to apply that knowledge. Equally, if an Economics course is attempting to develop a pupil's ability to think 'logically' then one cannot presume that the mere exposure to economic analysis or to its application will result in any contribution to the development of the pupil's ability to reason logically, or to his/her recognition of the nature of 'logical' reasoning.

Two obvious rejoinders can be directed towards the above propositions. Firstly, that all subjects in the secondary school curriculum are attempting to develop the pupil's ability to reason logically, so why assign any special significance to its importance in 'Economics'. Secondly, such a purpose is more appropriately achieved by a course in 'Logic' not one in Economics.

With regard to the latter point elementary 'Logic' is not explicitly taught in most secondary schools and when it is taught it is usually only offered to older and academically able pupils. When it is taught

implicitly in the context of the mathematics or 'Computer Studies' curriculum it is often understood as an abstract and symbolic language which has limited implications for the analysis of problems or situations of an applied nature. Insofar as Economics can deal with relatively 'real' situations and problems which pupils face in thier everyday existence the explicit teaching of aspects of logical reasoning in this context might more effectively demonstrate the general applicability of these principles.

The contention that all subjects are attempting to teach their pupils to reason logically ignores the possibility that not all subjects are as valid or appropriate for this purpose and that, as with 'Economics', they often do not explicitly attempt to achieve that purpose. The contention implicit in this paper is that the discipline of 'Economics' can be used to develop pupils thinking skills, especially those skills which are a feature of problem solving and decision making. The efficacy of Economics as a vehicle for developing pupils problem solving skills arises because the subjects main concern is that of analysing how scarce resources are allocated between competing wants. The core concept of the subject is therefore that of choice which paralells the central problem confronting all decision makers, namely the choice of competing alternatives to achieve a given purpose. Hartoonian (1981) identifies the specific thinking skills which are involved in the process of decision making and he groups these under three categories, namely; conceptualizing (e.g. observing, classifying), processing (e.g. inferring, predicting) and reasoning skills (e.g. deduction, induction). In the following section I will elaborate on the nature of decision making and provide examples of how economic issues can be used to engage pupils in decision making activities.

A second area in which economics can help develop pupils thinking skills is in developing their understanding of the common fallacies. A pupils initial attempts at an explanation of the causes of inflation, unemployment and underdevelopment can often serve as a basis for explaining the limitations of reasoning by analogy, of generalizing from small samples or of using the fallacy of 'post hoc ergo propter hoc' etc. Thus if a pupil believes that unemployment is caused by people being out of work or that inflation is the result of decimalization then an explanation of how his own view point differs from that of both the teacher and economic th. ry is not in itself a necessary indicator to the pupil of the fallacy of his reasoning. It could serve to convince him of the abstractness,

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impracticability or incomprehensibility of Economics and heighten his resolve to memorize its content. An invaluable opportunity might be lost by which the fallaciousness of the pupil's reasoning might be explained and subsequently, the nature of a logical analysis identified.

Whilst the inclusion of these topics might be implicit within the whole syllabus that does not suggest that it is therefore taught or learnt by pupils. By allowing such an important area to remain 'implicit' the possibility of pupils learning economics as a 'doctrine rather than as a method' is increased.

Attempts to extend 'Economics' into the curriculum of younger and less able pupils have often been characterized by an undifferentiated listing of a number of very desirable educational goals, and a suggestion that they can all, in some unspecified way, be achieved by a pupil studying 'Economics'. This approach, ironically, ignores the existence of opportunity costs both within a subject and within the school curriculum. And, as Leamer (1976) suggests.

> 'A course which is designed without a well conceived purpose is almost certain to do all things poorly.'

A course which attempts to introduce the pupils to logic through a study of economic problems and issues could make a worthwhile and substantial contribution to a pupil's general education, especially for those pupils who will leave school at the earliest opportunity.

Developing thinking skills : the case of Economics:

In this section I will initially provide illustrations of the types of economic issues and problems which can be used as material to ask questions which require pupils to recognise some of the main fallacies. Subsequently I will provide examples of the sorts of economic problems which can be used to develop pupils' problem solving skills.

Appendix 1 provides a variety of examples of the sort of economic issues which can be used to develop pupils ability to identify logical fallacies. According to the age and ability of the pupils the nature of both the questions asked and answers required will obviously vary, and, the data on which the questions are based can be found and presented in a variety of formats (Press cuttings, tape recorded conversations, speeches etc.).

Fels and Buckles (1981) and Silk (1978) provide a standardized procedure for analysing economic issues which require a decision. These are:

(1) Define the problem;

(2) Specify:

  (a) the goals or objectives

  (b) the policy options

  (c) the relevant economic concepts and principles

(3) Analyse the consequences of each of the policy options

(4) Use the results of (3) to evaluate the options according to each goal in turn

(5) Decide which of the alternatives is best in the light of the evaluations in (4) but also with regard to the different goals.

This procedure contains the basic elements which characterize most programmes which attempt to develop pupils' problem solving skills. A variety of published examples (Fels and Buckles 1981) of the ways in which economic issues can provide the basis for developing these skills are provided in Appendix 2.

The questions which pupils are required to answer on the items in Appendix 2 clearly follow the procedure for problem solving which is identified above. However two major problems arise. The first is the problem of generalizability and the second is that of transferability. In

answers to the questions in Appendix 2 without necessarily understanding the procedure implicit within the sequence of questions. It would also be possible for a pupil to understand and be able to use that procedure in a school subject without attempting to transfer its use to other content areas and to an issue encountered in an out of school context. Within Science the work of Driver (1981) and Solomon (1983) clearly indicates that pupils do not transfer the scientific principles learnt in school to their understanding of scientific phenomenon which they encounter in out of school contexts. I suspect that research in economics education would indicate a similar dichotomy.

A pupil's understanding of the procedure implicit in a problem solving exercise might be enhanced if the nature of that procedure was explicitly identified. One strategy for doing this would be to ask the pupils to identify the underlying similarities between the questions asked of the problems in Appendix 2, and to get them to write appropriate questions for another issue which is supplied to them. The problem of transferrability can be addressed to some extent by also selecting topical issues (or getting pupils to select issues) which are likely to be of concern to pupils outside school. (e.g. Bussing, Subsidized transport, Educational Vouchers, Subsidies for sporting activities etc.)

If existing subjects are to contribute to developing pupils thinking skills then it will be necessary for problems such as those outlined above to be addressed and possible solutions identified. issues which will also have to be addressed is the need to change the emphasis of existing school subjects away from subject content towards the development of thinking skills. This will necessitate consideration of how teacher training programmes can both improve teachers thinking skills (Morris 1984b) and train them to develop these skills amongst their pupils and it will require that the existing emphasis of curriculum materials and assessment procedures is changed.

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Summary:

To avoid the possibility that I might be accused of overstatement or special pleading I will initially clarify some of the claims that I have not made. Firstly I have not claimed that the study of Economics has a monopoly on the teaching of thinking skills. Neither have I claimed that all thinking skills can be or are taught most effectively through the study of economics. Thirdly I have not claimed that teachers should stop teaching economics and teach a course in logic.

I have argued that a strategy which supports, improves and disseminates existing developments in the secondary school curriculum maximizes the potential impact on schools. I have also argued that the teaching/learning of thinking skills is already a purpose of some economics programmes and that some thinking skills, namely the recognition of logical fallacies and the development of problem solving skills, can be effectively taught in the context of such programmes.

APPENDIX 1

1. The following questions could precede the statements below.

(I) Explain why you agree or do not agree with each of the following view points/statements.

(II) Analyse each of the following statements. In each case explain why you accept or reject the argument.

(III) Indicate those statements which you disagree with an explain why you disagree with them.

(IV) State which type of fallacy is contained in the following statements.

(a) The workers in the steel industry have increased their living standards by obtaining a pay rise. Therefore workers in all industries can increase their living standards by obtaining a pay rise.

(b) As price have fallen since there has been a high level of unemployment in the U.K. it must be that high unemployment caused prices to drop.

(c) The cause of unemployment is that people can't get jobs.

(d) The cause of inflation is prices kepp rising.

(e) There are more people unemployed in the N.E. than there are in the S.E. Educational standards must be higher in the S.E. than the N.E.

(f) Decreasing the money supply will decrease the rate of inflation ..... because I have just read an article which said so and it was written by a leading economist.

(g) A survey showed that most wealthy men in Hong Kong were of Shanghainese origin. A newspaper editorial commented that the survey proved that most Shanghainese were wealthy.

2. In a survey of homes in Nigeria, a statistician calculated that amongst families who pay a rent of between US$15-25 the death rate from Tuberculosis was 100 per 1000. Amongst those who paid a rent of between US$25-35 the death rate was 60 per 1000, and amongst those who paid a rent of between US$35-50 the death rate was 30 per 1000. It was concluded from this evidence that the way to stop Tuberculosis was to eradicate the poor housing in Nigeria. Do you agree with this conclusion? Explain why.

3. A food company developed a new biscuit snack called 'Zombies'. Before marketing the product the company decided to test consumer reaction to the new product in comparison to the current best selling snack called 'Crunchos'. A stall was set up in Harrods Department store and customers were then asked which product they preferred. Seven out of the ten customers interviewed preferred 'Zombies' and as a result the company decided to proudce it. Comment on the procedure used by the company in making its decision.

Multiple Choice Questions:

If all price increases cause some hardship and some strikes cause price increases then:

(a) All strikes cause hardship

(b) Some strikes cause hardship

(c) All hardship is caused by price increases

(d) All price increase are caused by strikes

If some economists are communists and some women are economists, then

(a) All women are communists

(b) All communists are economists

(c) Some women are communists

(d) Unable to say anything about the relationship between women and communists.

If event A closely follows event B, we may conclude that:

(a) Event A caused event B

(d) The two events may be related

(c) Event B will always follow event A

(d) There is a definite relationship between the two events

If each person in the labour force is over 16, then we can conclude that:

(a) There are no people under 16 in the country

(b) Mr. Jones, a farmer, is 16

(c) Mr. Williams, a lawyer, is at least 16

(d) Everyone in the country is at least 16

APPENDIX 2

Even Rationing Is Better Than Nothing

The text of this case appeared as an editorial in the New York Times on February 10, 1980. Copyright 1980 by the New York Times Company. Reproduced by permission.

Gasoline rationing is a terrible idea, the Carter Administration insists, all the more passionately since Senator Kennedy endorsed it. It should be used only if there is a severe fuel shortage, says the President. Do it now, says the Senator, to insure that everyone shares fairly in necessary sacrifice.

In the abstract, we would agree with the President. Almost any other way to hold down gasoline consumption would be preferable. But the issue is not rationing or no rationing. The President framed the issue in his State of the Union speech: "Our excessive dependence on foreign oil is a clear and present danger to our nation's security." Rationing may be among the least desirable remedies, but it is decidedly better than nothing -- which is what the President, having defined the danger, now proposes to do about it.

What's so terrible about rationing? Consider the Talmudic experience of the Gasoline Eligibility Committee in World War II. If newsreel cameramen were entitled to extra gas, how about newspaper photographers? No. Newspapers could survive without pictures but newsreels could not. Farmers were entitled to extra gas. Salesmen were not. What about farm fertilizer salesmen? No. Instructions could be disseminated in other ways. Could the Children's Theater of New York have extra gas, better to combat the "pernicious influence of the motion picture and the comic strip"? No. Don't you know there's a war on?

There's a war on: disappointed applicants might grumble, but there was no arguing with those four little words. And even so, disappointment did not stop at grumbling. The New York Times files for May 1944 tell of a New York man arrested for printing 5,160,000 counterfeit shoe stamps and 5,120,000 counterfeit gas coupons... of a Washington, D.C., auto dealer caught receiving "many thousands of gallons" of gasoline without any coupons.... of a school official in Springfield, Mass., moved to exclaim that "Rationing is producing a nation of liars."" Even with a war on.

What about peacetime rationing? Anthony Downs of the Brookings Institution has visualized it: "Farmers and truckers need above-average shares. So do policemen on duty, ambulance drivers and fire departments. And someoen has to decide how much petroleum will go to heat homes, or to the chemical industry for fertilizers.... Administrators will inevitably make large-scale allocations.... before deciding how to divide what is left for auto-driving individuals. Yet the American people will never believe these arbitrary judgments are truly fair, especially in the absence of any widespread feeling of dire emergency."

Apart from inflicting strains on the social fabric, a rationing system would impose substantial concrete costs as well. It might cost $2 billion a year to operate. Still, warts and all, rationing would save gasoline. It would ease the clear and present danger evident to the President, and to all who have noticed the location of America's neck and of the oil import noose.

We do not minimize the Carter Administration's energy achievements. It won the natural gas decontrol that other Presidents sought for 30 yars. the President courageously decontrolled oil prices. Important new initiatives are now in the legislative homestretch.

Nor do we ignore the possibility that before moving to reduce gas consumption further, the United States might impel other consuming nations to do the same. In his State of the Union Message, the President repeated the pledge that America would never again import more than 8.2 million barrels of oil a day. He also said, in words we review with new interest, "I am prepared to lower these imports still further if the other oil-consuming countries will join us in a fair and mutual reduction."

The Administration deserves credit and credibility. Its officials says it is wrong to get caught up in any particular method of reducing gasoline consumption, like rationing. Oil imports are already down about 5 percent compared with January 1979. The first question, they say sensibly, is what goal to set: how much more should consumption be reduced? Whether that goal is reached by this method or that is secondary.

But the President seems to be resting on his either/ors. We hear him calling out "clear and present danger" but hear no goal for reducing oil imports. The idea of winning cooperative conservation from other countries is attractive. But there nonetheless remains plenty of slosh in American energy use that could be saved through unilateral action. For instance, according to a new Conference Board survey, the typical American family could reduce its driving 10 percent or more without hardship.

Is not a rare and precious political moment at hand? In an atmosphere of Middle East crisis, Congress seems receptive to crisis leadership. And it seems to us that the public, so long resistant to the idea of energy crisis, is now waiting to be led. But all that is heard from Washington is why rationing is wrong.

It should be clear from what are now years of reiteration that we think the best way to cut gasoline use is to impose a hefty tax -- and then rebate the proceeds. We are, obviously, no fans of rationing. But even rationing is better than nothing.

- Questions -

(1) What Goal is implied for US oil policy in the article?

(2) What other possible goals might be considered?

(3) What are the policy options suggested in the article? What alternative policies should be considered.

(4) Use a Supply and Demand diagram to show why rationing and a gasoline tax and alternative ways to reduce oil consumption.

(5) Explain how each policy alternative is appropriate or not appropriate to achieve the goals you have identified.

(6) Do you think the government should impose rationing or a tax?

(Adapted from: Fels and Buckles 1981)

Air Bags May Be Motorists' Best Bargain Ever

The text of this case appeared as an editorial in the Columbia Missourian on July 31, 1977. Reproduced by permission.

It's now up to Congress to decide whether to go along with Transportation Secretary Brock Adams' decision requiring automakers to install air bags in new cars by the early 1980s.

Unless the House or Senate rejects the requirement within sixty days, the plan will become law.

Leading critics of the mandatory requirement for air bags cite two familiar themes on behalf of American consumers -- increased cost and unwarranted governmental intervention into private affairs.

Sen. Robert Griffin, R-Mich., whose constituency inlcudes the Detroit automakers, said Secretary Adams' decision will "put Big Brother in the front seat of every American automobile."

Griffin contends the government should not force air bags on a re reluctant public. The driver ought to have a choice. We may have agreed with that view if, indeed, the individual driver had a choice about being involved in a traffic mishap.

Admittedly, no American motorist enjoys being forced to purchase an option on his vehicle. But it is equally evident no American motorist wishes to be injured or killed in his travels. All too often automobile drivers and passengers suffer serious injuries in accidents which were "the other guy's fault."

Perhaps air bags would not be needed if American drivers wore seat belts, but only an estimated 20 percent of the nation's drivers buckle up. Unlike seat belts, air bags will not be regarded as a nuisance and cannot be ignored.

The other major argument against air bags must also be challenged. Congressional opponents contend the cost to American consumers will be $200 to $300 per car. The government's figure is only about half that.

Whatever the additional cost may prove to be, air bags are less expensive than many of the luxury options which are viewed today as necessities.

Air conditioning lists for over $400 on all new car stickers. A set of deluxe wire-wheel hub caps at local dealers for the largest automobile manufacturer will cost $102. And business is brisk.

The air bag is no small issue. Officials estimate air bags will save about 9,000 lives annually. Of the 130 persons who die each day in automobile accidents, 25 would be alive if effective air bag systems were installed in their cars.

In these terms, air bags should prove the best bargain motorists ever had.

- Questions --

(1) What are the different goals of the groups (a) supporting and (b) not supporting the introduction of air bags?

(2) What other goal could be pursued?

(3) What are the different policy options appropriate for the achievement of these goals?

(4) Illustrate graphically the effect of these policies on the market for automobiles. What other considerations need to be taken into account?

(5) Which of the following policy options do you support:

(a) the new safety regulations

(b) hands off by the government

(c) a government regulation that requires automobile manufacturers to allow consumers to choose air bags as an optional extra.

(Adapted from: Fels and Buckles 1981)

PRICE CONTROLS ON FOOD?

Cries of anguish greeted the news on March 21, 1973, that the consumer price index in February had suffered the greatest one-month rise in twenty-two years. The rise of 0.8 percent (seasonally adjusted) was equivalent to an annual rate of increase of 9.6 percent. The biggest increase was registered by the food component, which jumped 2.4 percent -- an annual rate of 28.8 percent. Senator William Proxmire, who had been urging a six-month freeze on all wages and prices, called the increase "shocking". George Meany, President of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, urged Congress to impose mandatory price controls on food prices "from farm to market". This view was supported in the following editiorial and attacked in the letter to the editor that comes after it.

> A funny thing about the healthy family appetite: it is somehow never appeased by a steady diet of soothing syrup in place of solid nourishment. It is all very pleasant to be told over and over by Administration experts that, if everybody just waits long enough, food prices will be coming down. But that doesn't fill any refrigerators or any stomachs either. Nor does it make it any easier to stretch the worker's paycheck at the supermarket checkout counter, even in this period of free-floating money.
>
> The steep new climb registered by food prices last month, with meat, fish and poultry again the fastest climbers, is bound to make vastly more difficult the holding of the wage line in rubber, electrical manufacture, trucking, the postal service and all the other activities involved in the heavy 1973 round of collective bargaining. The settlements registered thus far have reflected a considerable effort on the part of organized labor to hold back a resumption of the wage-price leap-frog that leaves everyone a loser. But even these settlements are placed in jeopardy by the mad uprush of prices in the msot basic part of every wage earner's budget.
>
> It is past time for President Nixon to exhibit the same readiness to dump cherished shibboleths about what will or won't work in the economy that he showed when he unveiled his new economic policy more than a year and a half ago. Mandatory controls on food, starting at the farm level, will have the same profound and constructive effect that the initial freeze did in restoring confidence among workers and all other consumers and in helping to sustain the buying power of the domestic dollar.

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We agree with your March 22 editorial, that it is time for President Nixon "to dump cherished shibboleths about what will or won't work" and adopt "mandatory controls on food starting at the farm level" -- but not for the reasons you give. The modern generation lacks experience with the price controls of World War II. As educators, we want it to learn by experience that price controls on farm products will necessitate rationing of foods by the Government, that rationing will lead to black markets, that black markets will undermine price control and that the cure will be worse than the disease.

Rendigs Fels
T. Aldrich Finegan
Nashville, March 23, 1973

Question: Should the President adopt mandatory price controls on food prices at all levels "from farm to market"?

Hints to help you analyze the case:

What policy option to fight inflation is suggested here?

What are the consequences of not using this policy?

What are the consequences of using this policy?

Are there other policy options available?

What are the consequences of the various policy options?

In short, follow the steps of a decision-making model.

(Source: Hartoonian 1982)

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